DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 302 839 CS 009 492

AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
TITLE Reform in the Reading Curriculum.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; *Educational Change; Educational Philosophy; Elementary Education; Evaluation Methods; Holistic Evaluation; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research
IDENTIFIERS Curriculum Emphases

ABSTRACT

In order for necessary reform in the reading curriculum to occur, a great debate in the teaching of reading is needed. Instructional management systems (or mastery learning) with their measurable objectives should be compared with holistic philosophies in reading instruction. A holistic approach to reading instruction should be implemented. Reading involves understanding sentences, paragraphs, and larger bodies of knowledge. Dividing skills into precise objectives for learners to attain violates what the actual act of reading is about. Quality research in reading must be refined and emphasized. At present, research results are confusing. Much negative research has been conducted and has little worth. Improved methods of conducting research must be emphasized. A study of the philosophy of education is very helpful in determining objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures. Perhaps, achieving a quality of philosophy of teaching reading is more valuable them conducting and using research results. However, with improved means of doing educational research, research results can be used to improve the reading curriculum. (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED302839

Reform in the Reading Curriculum

Marlow Ediger

Complaints are heard regularly pertaining to the number of illiterate people in society. Rather high percentages are given for individuals who cannot read. A twenty to twenty-five per cent figure is frequently given in news reports. The exact per cent will never be known. What constitutes an illiterate person in definition is a further point of debate. Illiteracy will come on a continuum, rather than as given absolute per cents.

There are people in society who, no doubt, fail to learn to read regardless of procedures, subject matter, and methodology. These individuals may even possess, seemingly, the capacity intellectually to learn to read. Those of inadequate capacities would need to be excluded from specific persons who have not learned to read when using per cents in the illiterate segment of the population. Even then, it is difficult to determine who lacks capacity in learning to read. All persons need to achieve as much as possible in the reading curriculum.

In this paper, the writer will zero in on issues and remediation procedures to improve the reading curriculum.

The Great Debate in the Teaching of Reading

A discussion of diverse procedures in the teaching of reading will need to occur. Presently, most states have identified core competencies and key skills for classroom teachers to emphasize in

CS009492

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Marlow Ediger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

reading instruction. Local teacher involvement is greatly minimized or nonexistent in selecting the state mandated objectives. It is believed that at the state level, a better job of selecting goals can be in evidence, as compared to teacher decision-making on the local level.

The district level may also identify numerous specific objectives for students to attain in reading. These become known as instructional management systems (IMS) or mastery learning. With IMS or mastery learning, as well as stated mandated objectives, each skill is clearly identified and stated in measurable terms. Either the learner has or has not achieved the skill as a result of teaching. The assumption to back the utilization of measurably stated objectives include:

1. reading skills to become good readers can be identified.
2. each skill can be stated in measurable terms, including an indicator to emphasize minimal levels of achievement.
3. students need to be tested frequently to insure mastery of each specific skill.
4. the end result will be improved reading instruction for each student.
5. all students can become literate individuals.

Too frequently, however, with the use of measurably stated objectives, the reading curriculum becomes fragmented. Isolated skills are taught and measured. Much time is spent on testing to

determine if the skills have been acquired by students. Additional time is spent by the teacher on recording the test results of each learner.

Reading skills then are taught and tested frequently. Time spent on the actual act of reading is greatly minimized. Learning of isolated skills, like phonics, does not involve the totality or gestalt of reading. Time spent on testing and recording of test results affects the time teachers spend on teaching reading and having students engage in reading content.

To minimize the dilemma of identifying core competencies and key skills, a great debate in the teaching of reading needs to occur. The debate should center around meeting individual needs of students in reading. These discussions should emphasize tenets and modifications of diverse philosophies in the teaching of reading. Which philosophies then should be emphasized?

Individualized reading has much to offer. A very minimal amount of time is spent in teaching specific skills. Reading is a more holistic enterprize, as compared to identifying and teaching each highly specific skill. In individualized reading, the entire time, as a whole, is spent on the actual act of securing ideas when learning to read. The student selects which library books to read sequentially. A wide variety of books on interesting topics needs to be in the offing. These books also should be on a variety of reading levels

to provide for the present achievement level of each student. The teacher is a guide and stimulater to challenge students individually to consume more reading materials. He/she has conferences with students on a one on one basis after a library book has been completed. A student may receive assistance on a specific skill, as identified in the conference. Otherwise in the conference, the teacher discusses subject matter that a pupil has read. The student can reveal the quality of reading by selecting content from the library book to read orally to the teacher.

A second holistic procedure to emphasize in teaching reading is the language experience approach. This method of teaching reading can be utilized on all age levels. For young students who do not have a writing vocabulary, the classroom teacher may print the ideas as presented by the former. To secure content, learners need to experience subject matter from audio-visual aids or from a story read to them. After these experiences, young learners present related subject matter to the teacher who in return prints these ideas in neat manuscript letters on the chalkboard. The teacher reads the content on the chalkboard with the involved pupils by pointing to the words and phrases. It does not take long before pupils begin to recognize words and phrases as the content is read with teacher guidance. At any age or grade level, when students have developed their own writing vocabularies, they may write up their own experiences

from ongoing lessons and units of instruction. Reading and writing are then correlated, not isolated entities.

A third holistic procedure in learning to read involves the use of basal readers. A minimal amount of time should then be spent on analyzing words, such as the use of phonics, syllabication, and structural analysis. Students must be guided to read sequential stories from the basal reader. The emphasis must be based on reading subject matter, rather than stressing analytic word attack skills.

Why are holistic procedures in the teaching of reading emphasized? Students can hurdle many problems in word recognition if interesting content is being read. Advocates of individualized reading tend to believe that analytic methods of instruction deemphasize interest in students wanting to learn to read. Interest, however, is a powerful factor in learning.

Secondly, if students are to learn to read, they must read and not spend excessive time analyzing words. Reading involves securing meaning from words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.

Purpose in reading comes from perceiving reasons for learning. Reading fascinating and challenging content provides sequence in learning. Isolated behaviors, such as achieving measurable reading skills, lacks purpose on the part of students.

Research versus Philosophy in Teaching Reading

Presently, the emphasis in education is to base methods and procedures of teaching in reading upon research results. Research

must be emphasized continually to secure data on which methods to use and not use in reading instruction. However, there are many weaknesses in research procedures used in reading. Frequently, with research findings, the following erroneous methods are emphasized:

a professor summarizes research studies in reading and develops selected conclusions, such as all pupils need to have daily, sequential lessons in phonics. The research studies used to develop conclusions may be poorly done indeed. Random sampling procedures for the experimental and control groups are not in evidence. Or, the experimental and control groups were not equated, if randomization was not possible. Other weaknesses in research studies include a lack of adequate numbers used in the study for both the experimental and the control group. Further weaknesses of research include

1. no controls on who teaches the experimental versus the control group.
2. low validity and reliability of measurement instruments used in the study.
3. a lack of utilitarian values of the completed research. External validity then goes downhill.

Truly bad research has been printed in leading scholarly journals Examples of deficient research are the following:

1. during the 1960's, two studies received much recognition which concluded that schools had very little affect, if any, on student

achievement. One would not need to do a research study to indicate that schools, as well as other institutions, do influence students. If students are in school 180 days in one calendar year which includes a six hour daily schedule of curriculum and cocurriculum activities, a vacuum does not occur in terms of learners learning something. Here, bad studies were made that tried to prove what the researchers wanted to prove.

A second bad study, among others, was made in the early 1980's which had to do with class size. The researchers concluded that class size had nothing to do with student achievement. One may then conclude that a classroom teacher could teach 100 students in a room without sacrificing student achievement. That is a ridiculous conclusion indeed. All things being equal, adding another student to a classroom makes for an additional student for the classroom teacher to provide for. The only exception might be that an additional motivated student could stimulate others to achieve more optimally in the classroom setting. However, one needs to be careful in adding one more motivated student in a classroom, especially if thirty learners are in the class setting already. One need do no research to indicate that a fifteen to twenty student ratio per teacher is adequate in number. When non-academic students and/or disrupters exist in a classroom, the ratio needs to be lowered.

A third bad method of reporting research is to say "Our data

indicate ____." These reporters fail to say where they received their information. They do not mention how many responses were made in the data collected, nor the percent of return. Nothing is said about any controls implemented in the study. Sophisticated writing of these published manuscripts is in evidence. Mixed into the context is "Our data show ____."

A fourth defective type of study exists when school administrators in their "research" indicate that "teachers really do not want higher salaries. What they really want is to receive recognition for good teaching." To be sure, good teachers do want these non-monetary rewards, but they also need higher salaries in order to stay on as quality classroom teachers and live a lifestyle commensurate with a college/university graduate.

Research in education then has not, by any means, answered problems pertaining to increased achievement on the part of students. Those research results that emphasize raising student test scores only, fail to realize the importance of students using what has been learned and applying these ideas in the real world of society. Personal and social development of students are also lacking when raising test scores becomes the ultimate goal of teaching.

An additional problem of raising test scores pertains to how this is done. The writer has visited schools where teachers teach directly to a standardized achievement test. The test is directly in

front of the classroom teacher to teach for. A few articles have been published whereby superintendents were hired in a district to raise test scores of students and thus improve the curriculum. As can be expected, the test scores of students increased lavishly. This, no doubt, will always happen in a like situation.

Teachers and administrators must not give up on conducting and using research results. However, the status of present day research leaves much to be desired indeed. Critical evaluation of published research is important.

Educators might also look toward a study of philosophy to determine goals, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures.

The Great Debate in education of the past can provide valuable input into curriculum improvement. William Chandler Bagley (1874-1946) advocated students mastering the essentials. In his The Essentialist Manifesto, published in 1938, Dr. Bagley believed that a core of knowledge exists which [illegible] should master. In the reading curriculum then, the same essential learnings would be required of all students. Interest in learning would not necessarily be an important criterion to follow in teaching, according to Dr. Bagley. Rather, the students need to will to learn. The learner must reach out and learn regardless of the amount of interest inherent in the reading curriculum.

John Dewey (1859-1952) in his book Democracy and Education advocates interest as a powerful factor to create effort in learning.

The goals of the student make for interest and effort.

Subject matter is not an end in and of itself. But, it is a means or instrumental to an end, according to Dr. Dewey. In the reading curriculum, students read to secure subject matter to solve problems. The problems must be realistic and life-like. School and society should not be separated from each other. Students might work in committees to gather data from reading, and other activities, to solve problems. John Dewey did not believe that common learnings, or essentials, existed which all students should learn. Rather, problems are unique to the student and the committee. Committees are utilized in society to solve problems. Therefore, the school curriculum needs to emphasize committee work and problem solving.

B. F. Skinner represents the philosophical school of thought of realism. With programmed learning, sequential steps for students to learn are written by the programmer. There is no input into the curriculum from students. Each sequential step of learning is measurable. Either a student has or has not responded correctly to a programmed item.

Realists believe that one can know in whole or in part the real world as it truly is. The reality of the real world in its specifics is identified in terms of behaviorally stated objectives.

In the reading curriculum, precise objectives can be identified according to realists. The chosen objectives can become a part of

the instructional management system (IMS) or state mandated core competencies and key skills. IMS and programmed learning emphasize measurably stated word recognition and comprehension skills.

Idealism, as a philosophy of education, emphasizes an idea centered curriculum. Idealists believe one can only know ideas and not know the real world as it truly is. With a reading curriculum emphasizing ideas, students need to do much reading to receive abstract learnings. Audio-visual aids would be used minimally, unless these materials assist students to secure concepts and generalizations in the abstract. The reading textbook, workbook, and worksheets provide major learnings for students. A variety of purposes or comprehension skills need to be taught students so that worthwhile subject matter can be learned. Word recognition skills are important as they assist students to secure abstract content.

Existentialism, as a fifth philosophy of education, emphasizes the individual student making choices and decisions, from among alternatives. To emphasize existentialist thinking, the teacher could have a variety of reading materials at a station. Means of interesting students in the diverse kinds of books and pamphlets should be in evidence, such as appealing bulletin board displays, as well as the teacher introducing selected materials to whet students' appetites for reading.

The sky would be the limit in terms of the numbers of materials

read, as well as the complexity of each. Decisions are up to the student. The latter may also determine the methods of appraisal to assess what any one reader got out of the reading materials in terms of comprehension.

Existentialists believe strongly in knowledge being subjective, not objective. The contents of the reading materials be it biographical, autobiographical, the fine arts, historical, geographical, scientific, among others, should assist students to look at and clarify values. To an existentialist, life consists of choosing from among alternatives in an absurb environment. To be human is to make choices in life. If others make decisions for the self, the latter ceases to be human.

The teacher must be a guide and a stimulator to students. He/she must help learners to make decisions, but not make choices for students.

A study of philosophy may well provide teachers with an excellent basis in making decisions in the reading curriculum. The Great Debate in reading might then center itself around

1. identifying the basics or essentials, as essentialists recommend. These core learnings would be common to all students. The essentials must be identified carefully. Research results can be brought into the identification process. The research could include a basic list of updated words that all students should master in reading for each

grade level. However, individual differences must be provided for among slow, average, and fast learners. Each student must achieve optimally.

2. using problem solving approaches, as experimentalists advocate. Problem solving stresses students reading subject matter to answer questions and securing solutions to problems.

3. identifying vital precise objectives for students to attain, as advocated by realists. Critical and creative thinking must not be minimized in the process.

4. gleaning worthwhile generalizations in reading in an idea centered curriculum, as emphasized by idealists.

5. attempting to clarify values within dilemma situations, as stressed by existentialists.

The Psychology of Learning

How can each student be assisted to achieve as much as possible in reading? This is a problem for educational psychology to assist in solving. Psychologists would tend to agree on selected broad guidelines in teaching students. These guidelines can be applied to the teaching of reading.

To assist students to achieve optimally in reading, he/she needs to be involved in choosing reading materials which possess personal interest. When objectives for students to attain are identified external to the learner, a lack of interest in reading may be an

end result. The student needs to have more control over the reading curriculum. The objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures should not be handed down, solely or in large part, from the state level, such as in state mandated goals. Neither should IMS procedures of teaching be handed down from the district level to the classroom level. Rather, intrinsic motivation is important in developing the reading curriculum. Being involved in choosing materials to read is important to learners. If students have a desire to read self-chosen materials, intrinsic motivation is then involved. From within, the learner then wants to read. The teacher is a guide and stimulator.

Sequence resides within the student. It does not reside within state mandated objectives or IMS. The student then needs to select stimulating, challenging reading materials. A wide variety of topics based on diverse levels of reading achievement is necessary. Students individually may then select which subject matter to read. The learner selects reading materials based on intrinsic interests. He/she chooses content based on personal interests, needs, and purposes. Intrinsic motivation is then in evidence. Sequentially, the student selects subject matter to read.

Extrinsic motivation procedures in reading should be utilized if intrinsic procedures do not work. Primary (the actual prizes) and secondary reinforcers (tokens to be exchanged for prizes) may

be used to encourage reading. Standards for receiving the reinforcers should be announced to students so the latter may be motivated to increase the amount and quality of reading materials consumed. The rewards are extrinsic to the actual act of reading. However, they do serve as reinforcers for students to do more reading and on a variety of topics.

There are general criteria for teachers to follow in teaching which all educational psychologists agree with. First of all, students should attach meaning to subject matter read. If learners do not understand what has been read, frustration tends to set in. Meaning theory in learning emphasizes students comprehend content while reading. A lack of meaning in understanding subject matter truly wastes the time of students, as well as of the classroom teacher in teaching-learning situations.

Secondly, learners need to perceive purpose or reasons for learning. If students do not perceive the value of reading, no doubt, limited comprehension and learning will occur. The teacher may explain to students the worth of reading specific selections. A deductive approach is then utilized. Should the teacher utilize a questioning approach to have students perceive the values of reading, an inductive method is in evidence.

Thirdly, students should experience interesting learning opportunities. If learners are attracted to reading subject matter, they

will attain more optimally as compared to a lack of interest. It behooves the reading teacher to permit students to select more of their very own materials to read. Interest from students will provide for effort in reading. Interest and effort become integrated, not separate entities. Students tend to be interested in content which they selected on an individual basis. Attending to the task at hand is important. Interest will make for the attending to time on task.

Fourthly, individual differences among students need adequate attention. There are slow, average, and fast achievers, on a continuum, in reading. Materials for students to read must be on diverse levels of achievement to provide for each category of achiever. Subject matter contained in the reading materials needs to be varied to provide for diverse interests that learners bring to the reading curriculum. New interests must also be developed within students. The reading teacher's philosophy of teaching must adhere to respecting differences among students. Each person has dignity, much worth, and must be guided to achieve as much as possible in reading.

In Conclusion

Reform in the reading curriculum is needed. A great debate in the teaching of reading is needed. State mandated objectives and IMS with their measurably written goals should be compared with holistic philosophies in the teaching of reading. The writer recommends strongly that a holistic procedure in reading instruction

be implemented. Reading involves understanding sentences, paragraphs, and larger bodies of knowledge. Dividing skills into precise objectives for learners to attain violates what the actual act of reading is about.

Quality research in reading must be refined and emphasized. However, research results are indeed confusing. Much negative research has been conducted and has little worth. Improved methods of conducting research must be emphasized. A study of the philosophy of education is very helpful in determining objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures. Perhaps, achieving a quality philosophy of teaching reading has more worth as compared to conducting and using research results. However, with improved means of doing educational research, their results can continually assist to improve the reading curriculum.